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SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

NEIL GAIMAN
GLYN DILLON
CHARLES VESS
DEAN ORMSTON
D'ISRAELI

THE

SANDMAN™

THE

KINDLY ONES

PRESSURE IN MY EARS WOKE ME UP WHEN WE WERE COMING IN FOR A LANDING.

I WOKE UP IN PAIN, DISORIENTED.

I HELD MY NOSTRILS SHUT WITH MY FINGERS, BLEW HARD UNTIL MY EARS POPPED OUT AND THE PAIN STARTED TO GO AWAY.

SOMEHOW, WHEN I WOKE, I WAS EXPECTING TO SEE MY MOM IN THE SEAT BY THE WINDOW.

I WAS GOING TO TELL HER THE DREAM I JUST HAD. IT WAS ABOUT THE OLD DAYS IN FLORIDA WITH HAL AND CHANTAL AND GILBERT AND EVERYONE.

INSTEAD OF MOM, THERE'S A GUY BY THE WINDOW AS BIG AS GILBERT WAS.

GILBERT SMELLED LIKE CINNAMON AND LICORICE. A LITTLE LIKE THANKSGIVING, OR CHRISTMAS. THIS GUY SMELLS SOUR AND UNWASHED.

HE'S SITTING READING THE SAME LITTLE PORN MAG HE PULLED OUT OF HIS BAG WHEN WE TOOK OFF.

HOW DO YOU READ THE SAME PORN MAG FOR TWELVE HOURS?

HE DOESN'T EVEN LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW AS WE COME DOWN.

CREEP.

GATWICK AIRPORT HASN'T CHANGED FROM HOW I REMEMBER. THIS TIME I GET GRABBED BY A CUSTOMS GUY. HE'S GOING THROUGH MY VALISE WHEN I SMELL THE SAME SOUR SMELL AGAIN.

THE CREEP'S TRUNDLING HIS TROLLEY PAST ME. I REALIZE HE'S SEEN MY MAYBE-I'LL-GET-LUCKY LACY PANTIES. AND I FEEL SUDDENLY KIND OF EXPOSED AND STUPID.

HEY. YOU LOOKING FOR ME?

MISS WALKER?

WALKER

THAT'S *ME*. BUT I WAS EXPECTING MISTER HOLDAWAY.

THAT'S *ME*.

UH-UH. I *MET* MISTER HOLDAWAY, FOUR, FIVE YEARS BACK.

WA ER

I'M JACK HOLDAWAY. YOU MET MY UNCLE. HE PASSED ON A FEW YEARS AGO, I'M AFRAID. DICKY HEART.

I'M SORRY.

WELL, HE HAD A GOOD INNINGS. COME ON, THE CAR'S IN THE CAR PARK. I'LL TAKE YOUR SUITCASE.

I'D BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO RIDING IN MISTER HOLDAWAY'S BIG OLD JAGUAR AGAIN. I COULD SMELL THE LEATHER IN MY MEMORY.

INSTEAD JACK'S DRIVING SOMETHING ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF A BATHTUB.

IT IS, HE TELLS ME PROUDLY, A RESTORED AUSTIN SOMETHING-OR-OTHER.

WE SPEND HALF AN HOUR DRIVING THROUGH THE SUSSEX COUNTRYSIDE. IT SEEMS PRETTIER THAN I REMEMBER IT : OR PERHAPS MY TASTES ARE CHANGING.

I STAY AWAKE THE WHOLE WAY, THIS TIME, WHILE JACK DOES THE CONVERSATION THING THAT THE ENGLISH *DO SO* WELL, WHERE THEY CAN TALK FOREVER AND NEVER TELL YOU A THING.

THE KINDLY ONES 6

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SO, DO YOU, UM. KNOW HOW LONG YOU'RE GOING TO BE HERE?

NO. I JUST WANT TO WANDER AROUND. TALK TO PEOPLE.

THIS WAS WHERE MY GRANDMOTHER SPENT MOST OF HER *LIFE*, YOU KNOW.

WELL, YES. UNCLE JACK TOLD ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT IT. FUNNY BUSINESS. SLEEPING YOUR LIFE AWAY.

LIKE THAT ROBIN WILLIAMS FILM.

WELL, I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO THE DUTY NURSE, AND THEN, IF YOU DON'T NEED ME TO HANG AROUND, I'LL TAKE THE CAR INTO WYCH CROSS AND GET YOU ALL BOOKED INTO THE HOTEL.

I PICKED THE *WHITE HART* INN. IT'S MEANT TO BE VERY NICE.

I CAN DROP OFF YOUR SUITCASE, TOO.

THANKS.

KNOCKETY KNOCK. HULLO. ANYBODY HOME?

PAUL! GOOD LORD--PAUL McGUIRE. HOW ON EARTH ARE YOU?

HELLO, YOUNG JACK.

ROSE, THIS IS PAUL McGUIRE. HE ACTUALLY OWNS THIS NURSING HOME. PAUL, THIS IS ROSE WALKER, A HOLDAWAY'S CLIENT.

ROSE, THIS IS THE DUTY NURSE, MRS., UM...

SHORE. MRS. SHORE. PLEASURE, DEAR. TEA? I'VE GOT COFFEE, TOO.

NO. NO, THANK YOU.

JACK'S A FRIGHTFUL LIAR. I'M MERELY REPRESENTING ONE OF THE INVESTORS. DO YOU HAVE A RELATIVE HERE, MISS WALKER?

NOT ANYMORE. MY GRANDMOTHER WAS HERE, SOME YEARS BACK.

SHE WAS ASLEEP HERE.

NOW, YOU'RE NOT ENGLISH, ARE YOU? HOW DO YOU KNOW YOUNG HOLDAWAY?

HIS COMPANY ARE MY FAMILY'S ENGLISH LAWYERS. THEY'VE WORKED FOR US FOR LIKE, A ZILLION YEARS.

SINCE THE '45 REBELLION, I WAS TOLD.

SO I FAXED HIS OFFICE AND TOLD THEM I WAS COMING TO ENGLAND. I'M A WRITER. I'M WRITING A BOOK ABOUT MY GRAND-MOTHER. I WANTED TO GET A SENSE OF THE PLACE WHERE SHE LEFT HER LIFE. SPENT HER LIFE.

YOU SAID SHE WAS ASLEEP HERE?

SHE WAS SICK. HER NAME WAS UNITY KINKAID.

UNITY KINKAID? THE NAME'S FAMILIAR...

YOU REMEMBER, MISTER McGUIRE. THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

OF *COURSE*. OUR LONGEST RESIDENT. THE *MIRACLE* CURE. I MET HER, ONCE, TOWARD THE END. AFTER SHE HAD WOKEN UP.

VERY *VITAL* WOMAN. VERY YOUNG IN THE HEART.

I'M AFRAID THAT AT THE TIME I FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO APPRECIATE THE *IRONY*.

WELL, I *MUSTN'T* KEEP YOU. FEEL FREE TO POTTER AROUND AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE.

JACK, *GOOD* SEEING YOU. YOU SHOULD COME DOWN TO THE GATEHOUSE SOME TIME.

GOODBYE, MISS WALKER.

NURSE, I'M GOING TO HAND ROSE OVER TO YOU. I'LL COME BACK AND PICK HER UP IN, WHAT, A COUPLE OF HOURS, ROSE?

THREE.

THREE HOURS IT IS. I'LL HAVE YOU ALL CHECKED IN AND EVERYTHING.

RIGHT, LOVE. WHAT CAN I *DO* FOR YOU?

I'D REALLY LIKE TO SEE MY GRANDMOTHER'S OLD ROOM, I THINK. WHERE SHE SLEPT.

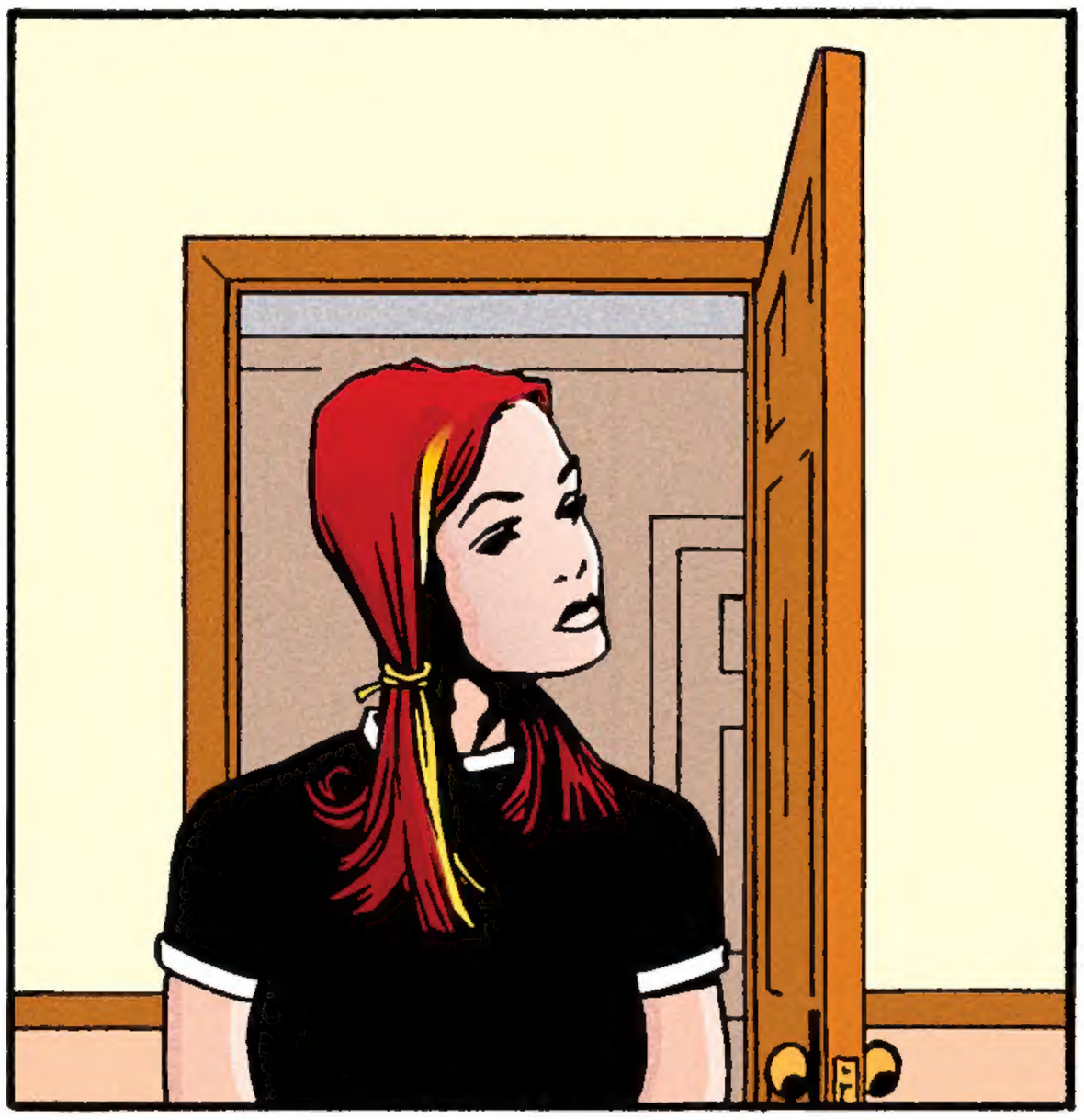
VERY GOOD. DO YOU REMEMBER WHICH *ROOM* IT WAS?

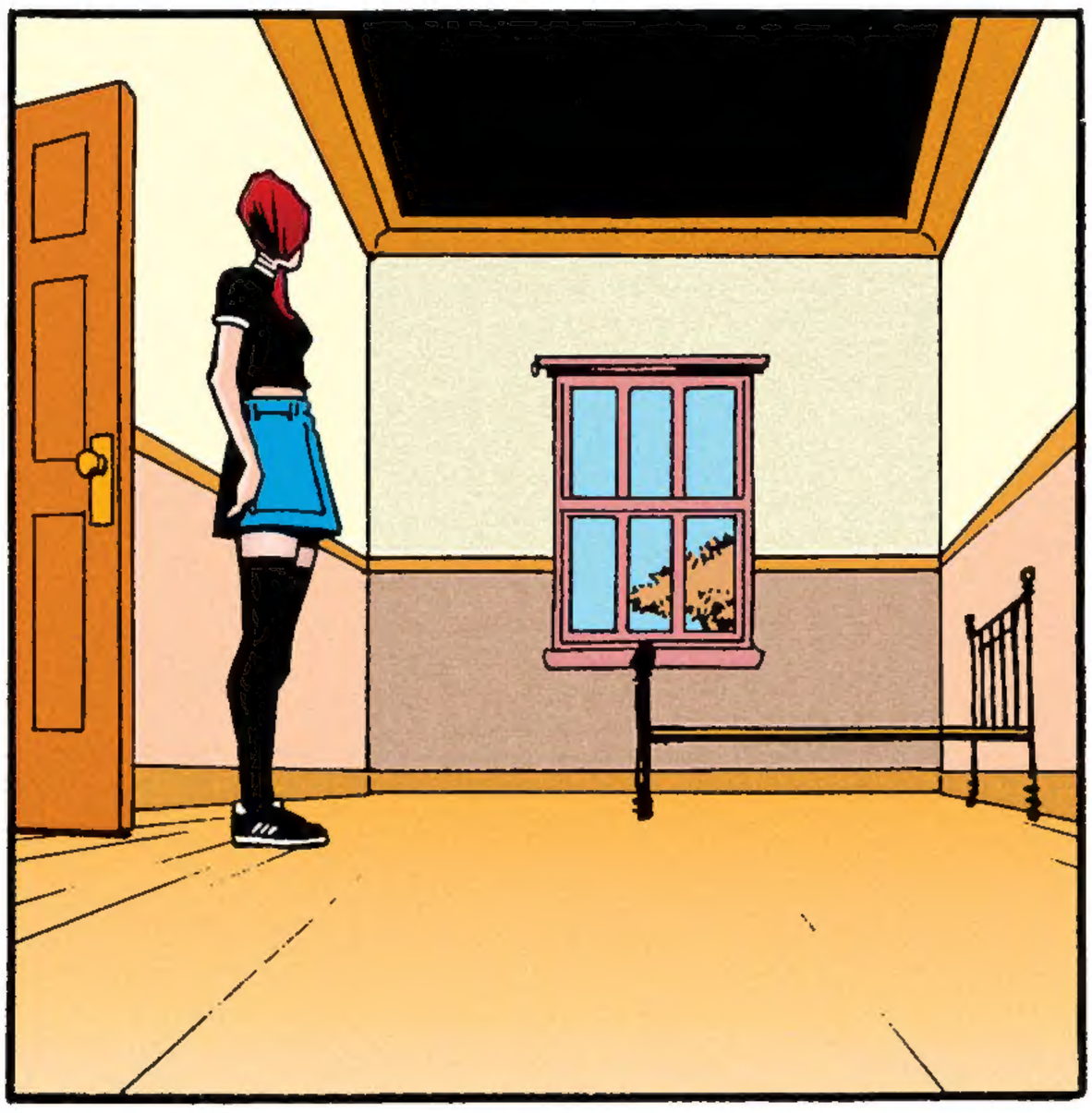
I'M NOT SURE I COULD *FORGET* IT. UP THE STAIRS, AND DOWN THE HALL TO THE END.

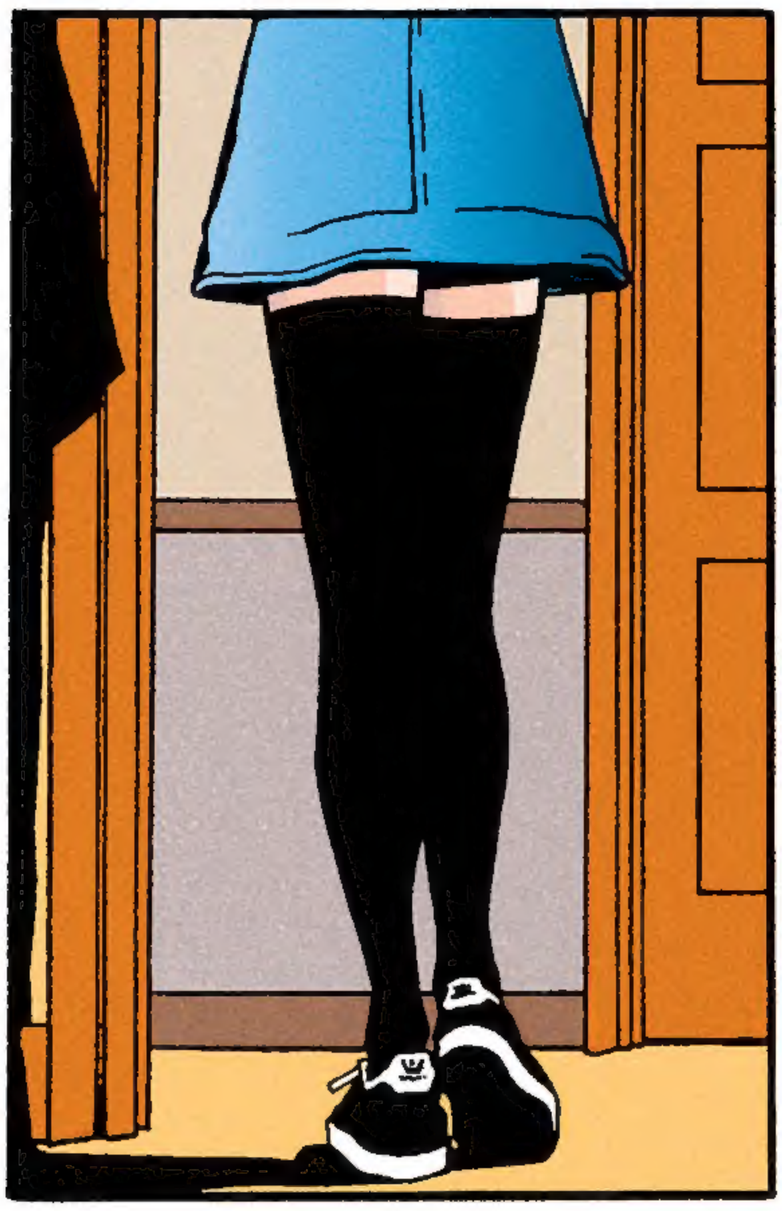
THERE'S NO ONE IN THERE JUST NOW. CAN YOU SEE YOURSELF UP? ONLY THERE'S REALLY ONLY *ME* RIGHT NOW, AND I CAN'T BE DOING WITH ALL THE STAIRS IF SOMEONE NEEDS *ME*.

I COULD PROBABLY LOOK IT UP, IF YOU CAN'T.

NO, SURE. *FINE*. WHATEVER.







UH. HELLO? IS THERE ANYBODY HERE?

TCH.

THAT'S THE BROOM CUPBOARD IN THERE, LOVE. WHAT YOU DOIN' IN THERE?

JUST LOOKING.

WHAT ARE YOU THEN? SOMEBODY'S GRAND-DAUGHTER? SOMEBODY'S NIECE? ARE YOU VISITIN'? OR ARE YOU WITH THE HOME?

YOU CAN TELL ME OFF IF I'M ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS. BUT IT'S NOT OFTEN THERE'S A LASSIE IN THE BROOM CUPBOARD.

WELL, IT'S KIND OF A LONG STORY.

WELL, WE'VE ALL GOT TIME HERE, MY PET. I'M GOING DOWN TO THE DAY ROOM.

YOU COMIN'?

YES. I SUPPOSE I AM.

AND I HOPE I'M NOT BEING TOO BOLD, BUT DID I HEAR YOU ASKIN' IF THERE WAS ANYONE IN THE BROOM CUPBOARD?

YES.

WERE YOU EXPECTIN' SOMEONE? IN THE BROOM CUPBOARD?

NOT REALLY.

THANK YOU, DEAR. WHERE ARE YOU FROM? SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE A BIT OF A YANKEE DOODLE DANDY TO ME.

YES. I'M FROM AMERICA.

I HAD A BOYFRIEND FROM AMERICA. YOU'D NOT THINK IT TO LOOK AT ME NOW, BUT I DID.

OVER IN THE *WAR*, HE WAS. AND HE WAS BLACK AS THE ACE OF SPADES. HE WAS *LOVELY*. I HAD A LITTLE *GIRL*, TOO. BUT MY MOTHER MADE ME PUT HER OUT FOR ADOPTION. I WAS HOPIN' NO ONE WOULD WANT HER, BEING HALF DARKIE, AND SO I'D GET TO *KEEP* HER.

BUT THEY *DID* AND I *COULDN'T*.

EVEN THE OLDEST STORIES ARE NEW TO *SOME*BODY...

WE BETTER INTRODUCE OURSELVES, DEARIE. *I'M* AMELIA CRUPP, *THIS* IS MAGDA TREADGOLD, AND THIS IS... I CAN'T SAY YOUR LAST NAME, DEARIE.

THEY *NEVER* GET MY NAME RIGHT. CALL ME HELENA, MY DEAR.

I'M ROSE. ROSE WALKER. MY GRANDMOTHER WAS UNITY KINKAID. SHE WAS *HERE*, UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO.

SLEEPING BEAUTY. YES?

THAT WAS HER.

YOU'RE NOT TELLING *THAT* OLD STORY AGAIN?

I REMEMBER *HER*. THEY WOULD WHEEL HER OUT INTO THE SUN, OR DOWN *HERE* WHEN IT WAS COLD. SHE WAS FAST ASLEEP...

THIS IS WHERE *WE* SIT. IN THE EVENING WE WATCH TELLY. IN THE AFTERNOON, TOO, ONCE *BLOCKBUSTER* COMES ON. '*I'LL*, HAVE A P, BOB...'

HEHEHEH...

WE PLAY A LITTLE DRAUGHTS. *AND* SNAKES AND LADDERS. WE *USED* TO PLAY *BRIDGE* UNTIL MRS. SMALL HAD HER STROKE.

YOU DON'T PLAY BRIDGE, DO YOU?

NO.

PITY. WE ALSO TELL STORIES. THINGS WE DID AND THINGS WE HEARD. STUFF FROM WHEN WE WAS LITTLE. YOU SHOULD SIT *DOWN*, LOVEY. TAKE THE *WEIGHT* OFF YOUR LEGS.

IT'S *FUNNY* WHAT YOU REMEMBER...

NOT *FUNNY* HA-HA, THE *OTHER* FUNNY.

ME, I COULDN'T TELL YOU WHAT I DID YESTERDAY. MY DAUGHTER, SHE CAME OUT OVER WHITSUN, WITH HER CHILDREN, I COULDN'T REMEMBER THEIR *NAMES*.

BUT I REMEMBER MY *CHILDHOOD* SO CLEARLY. I REMEMBER THE NAMES OF THE GIRL I SHARED A DESK WITH, IN THORNTON ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL. PRUNELLA WIPER, IT WAS. *SUCH* A FUNNY NAME.

I REMEMBER ALL OUR SKIPPING RHYMES, CLEAR AS DAY. MY MOTHER SAID, I NEVER SHOULD, PLAY WITH A GYPSY IN THE WOOD...

I REMEMBER *SO* MANY THINGS.

MY MAM, SHE WAS AN OLD *HARPY*, SHE WAS. BUT WHEN YOU GOT HER TO TALKING, SHE COULD TELL *SUCH* STORIES.

I NEVER KNEW WHERE SHE *GOT* THEM FROM. SHE COULDN'T READ MUCH. SOME SHE MUST'VE MADE UP, SOME SHE MUST'VE HEARD.

SHE TOLD US THAT ONE ABOUT THE SLEEPING BEAUTY IN THE WOOD, ONLY SHE *DIDN'T* TELL IT LIKE THEY DO ON THE TELLY. HE DIDN'T WAKE HER WITH A *KISS*.

IT WAS *MORE* THAN *KISS* HER HE DID, TO HEAR MY MAM TELL IT, AND EVEN *THAT* DIDN'T WAKE HER. SHE SLEPT UNTIL SHE GAVE BIRTH TO TWINS...

AND THEY CRAWLED UP HER BODY, SEEKING MILK TO SUCK, AND ONE OF THEM SUCKED THE POISONED NEEDLE FROM HER FINGER. YES?

WHY, *YES*. THAT WAS HOW ME MAM TOLD IT.

IT'S AN *EARLY* FORM OF THE STORY, BEFORE THEY STARTED TIDYING IT UP. I USED TO HAVE A *FRIEND* WHO'D TELL ME SOME OF THE ORIGINAL STORIES.

THERE, AND YOU *SEE*? I THOUGHT ME MAM JUST MADE IT WORSE TO SCARE US.

THE STORY SHE USED TO TELL US THAT I COULD *NEVER* GET OUT OF MY HEAD, SHE CALLED *THE FLYING CHILDREN*. HAVE YOU HEARD *THAT* ONE, DEAR?

I DON'T *THINK* SO.

STORIES, MAGDA. *ALWAYS* YOU TELL STORIES.

WELL, IT'S NOT LIKE ANYONE'S GOING TO TAKE ME *DANCING*.

IT'S A *BAD* THING WHEN YOU GET SO OLD. A BODY SHOULDN'T GET OLD.

INSIDE I'M NOT OLD. BUT I COULDN'T DANCE NOW, NOT EVEN IF I WAS *ASKED*...

THE STORY ABOUT THE CHILDREN WHO FLEW AWAY?

OF COURSE, PRETTY. I WAS JUST *GETTING* TO THAT...

Well, the way me mam told it, there was a man who loved the ladies. He was always carrying on with one pretty face after another. Loved 'em, and forgot 'em as he went from town to town.

So one day he spied a gal washing herself in the river, mother-naked and all in her birthday suit. So he hides her clothes. And when she comes out of the river, she sees him.

He says he'll give her back her clothes if she'll be his lady-love, but she won't be his lady unless he swears he'll make her his wife--and in the first church they come to, at that.

I swear if I set foot in a church, it'll be to marry you, he said (and the devil he'd step into a church ever again, he swore under his breath).

And what'll you swear, she asks, *if you break the vow?*

If I don't marry you, he said, may that worms shall eat me (for they'll do that anyway, he thought, when my time's over and up), and if I don't marry you, I wish our children might grow wings and fly away (and no great matter if they do, he thought).

So they kissed then and there, and did other things besides, and when they were all done, he gave her her clothes back, and she followed him down the road.

They passed the first church.
Let's get married here, she says.
Oh, he says, we can't get married here, for the vicar's a sick man, and besides, he's off a-hunting.

She said nothing but she looked at him as if her heart would break.

When they came to the next church, her belly was already beginning to swell.

Let's be married here, she says.

I'm not going into that church, he says, for the vicar's a drunkard, and no better than he should be, and the sexton's no partic'lar friend of mine, neither.

But you SWORE, she said.

I'm not going in the church, he tells her, and he knocks her down.

Her face is bleeding when she gets up.

So THAT'S how it is, she says.

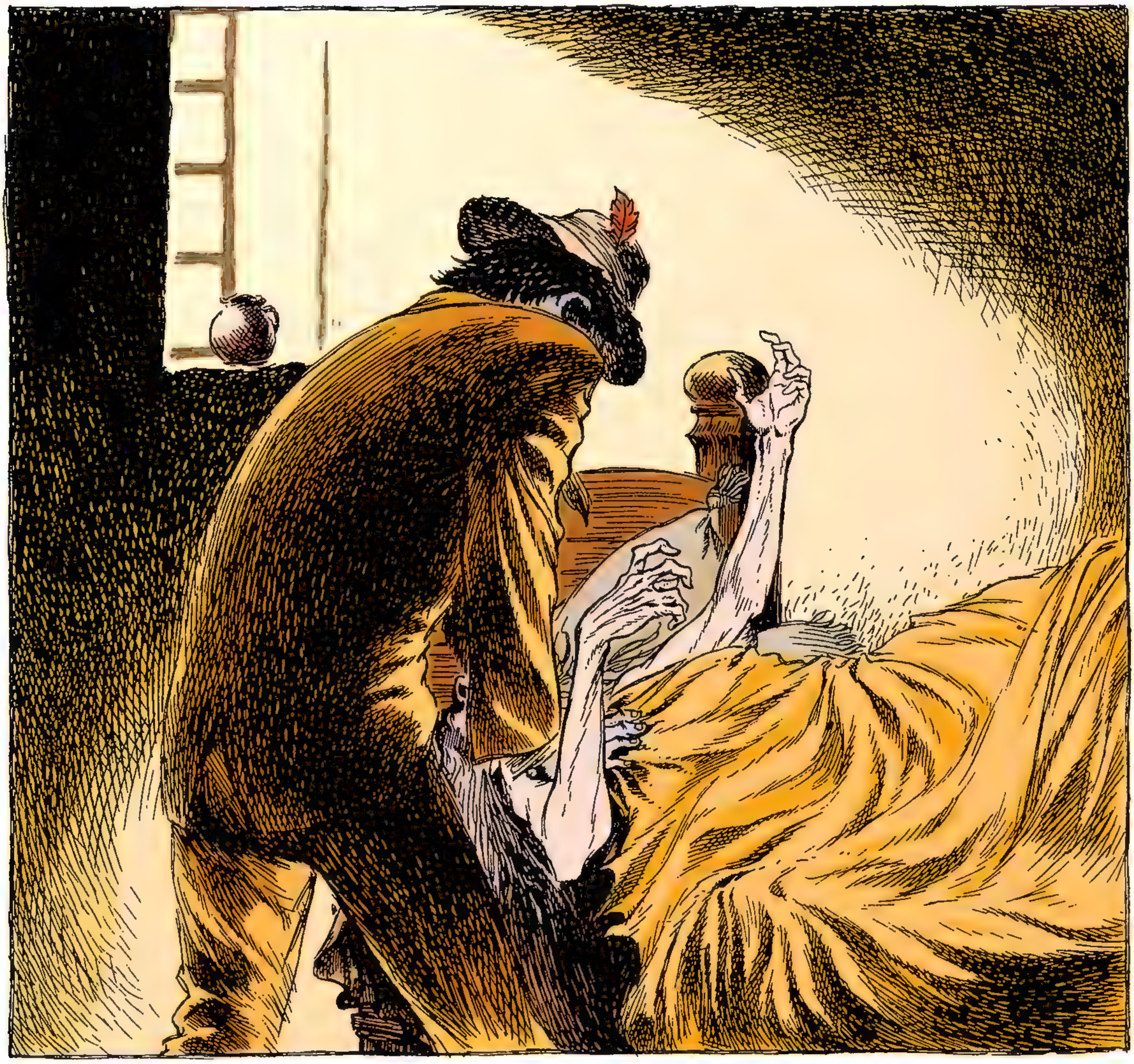
That's how it is, he tells her.

Well, she says, my belly's big with child. And I want to stop for a while. I can't keep on the road. Isn't there a place where I can rest?

So he has her stop there and sit, at the side of the road, and he goes on ahead.

He gets to a cottage, and he goes into the cottage, for the door's just on the latch, not locked, and in the cottage he sees an old woman fast asleep on the bed.

Now, sometimes the way me mam would tell it, the woman was a witch, and sometimes when she told it, she wasn't. But whichever, she was old and weak, and he held her mouth shut, and held his fingers over her nose until she couldn't breathe no more, and he took her out the back, and buried her in the midden heap.



He went back to his wife, and he says *It's a good thing we passed by here, as my old aunt has just died and left us her cottage.*

Oh, he was a bad one, that man. So he took her to the cottage...

He was a man. They're all bad.

Not my Danny, he wasn't, God rest him.

So he took her to the cottage...?

Yes, dear, and there he left her. He'd come back every few weeks to make sure she was still there, and to see his children, for she had three lovely girls over the next few years. But he was only home for a day here or there, and then he'd be off tomcatting over the whole countryside again.

It was a deserted part of the country, but there were vegetables in the garden, and now and then he'd bring her back a hen or a pig, so she never starved, and neither did the children.

Only, one day he comes home, and the children are nowhere to be seen. And the little girls are the apples of his eye...

Where are the children? He asks his wife. Gathering berries, she says.

In the spring? He says. (There aren't any berries in the spring, dear. I don't know if they have spring where you come from.)

But she says nothing, and the children don't come home.

So when night comes, he says to her *Where's the children?* Off fishing, she tells him.

The baby too? he asks her. But she pretended she couldn't hear him.

In the morning he woke her up: *Where are the children? WHERE ARE MY GIRLS?*

They've flown away, she told him.

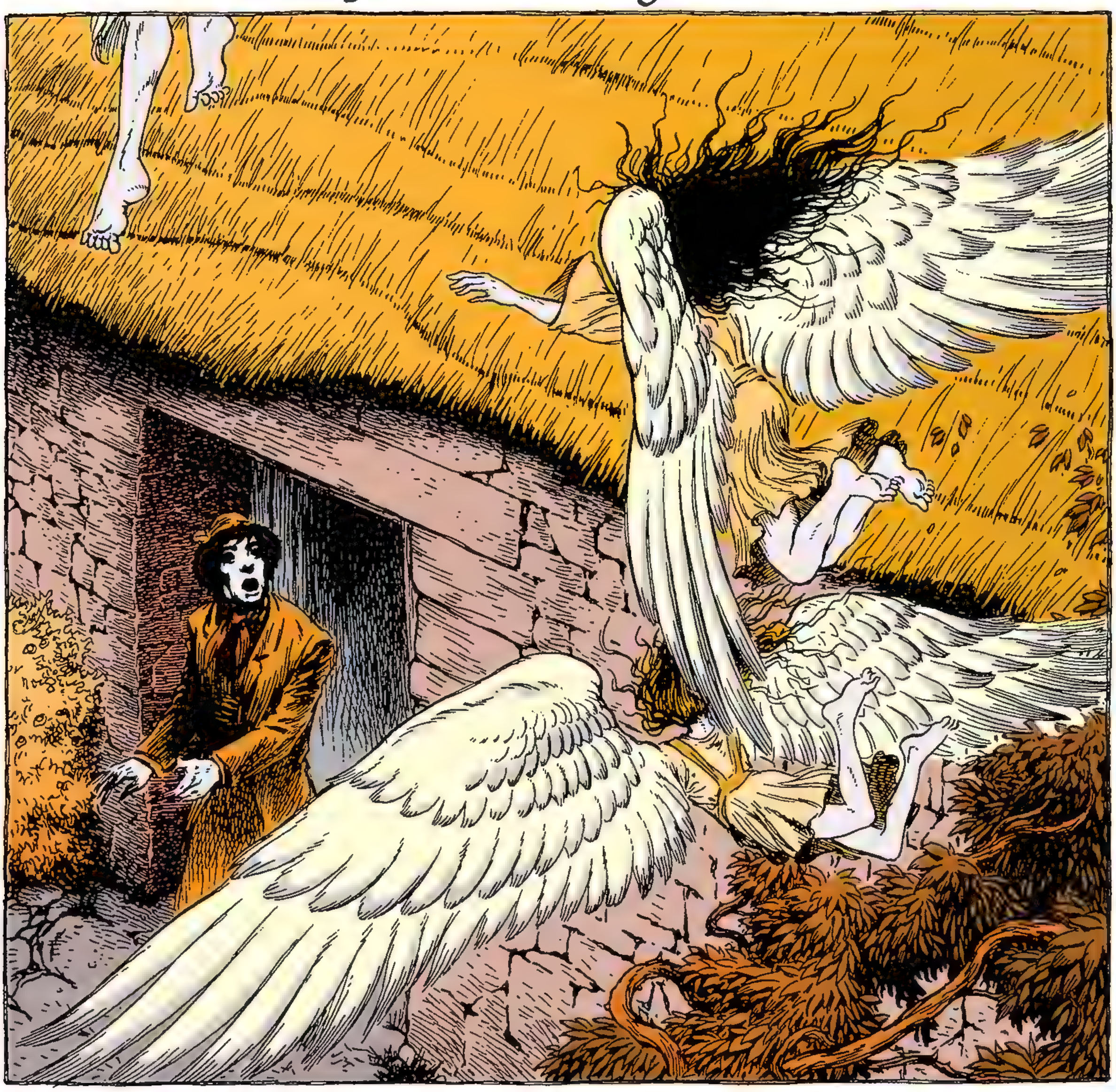
Flown away? He shakes her to make her tell him the truth, but she won't change her tale.

So he fetches the axe in from outside, and he chops her up into bits.

There's a noise from outside, so he pushes the lumps and limbs and lights of her under their bed.

And it's his daughters, the oldest, the middle, and the little wee baby, coming down from the sky, each on wings.

They come inside the cottage.



Where's our mam? they asked him.

She's out, picking berries, he tells them.

And what's all this blood on your hands and on the floor?

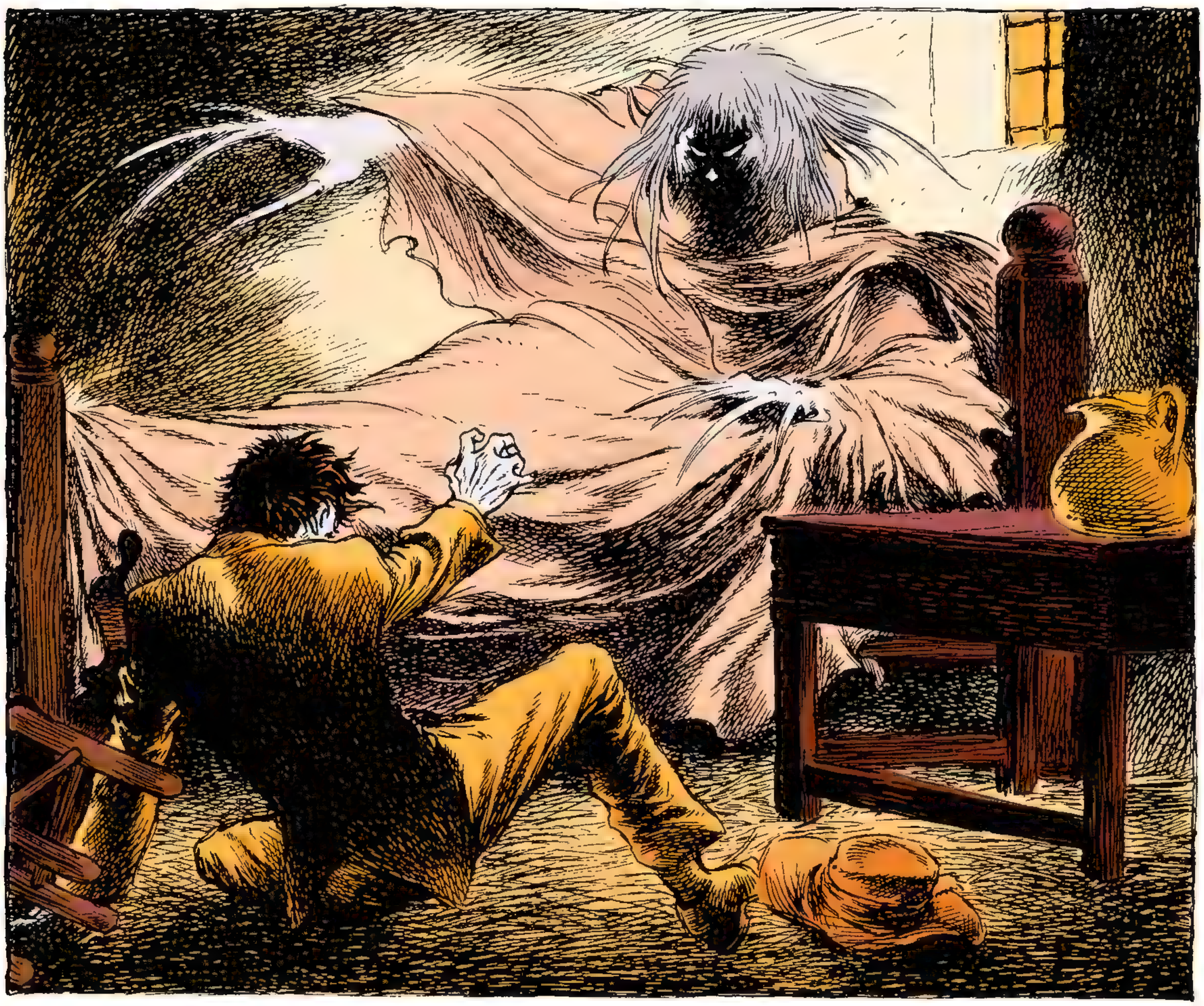
I was killing a pig, he says.

But the youngest girl she looks under the bed, and she sees her mother's dead face, staring out at them.

And they let out a wail deep and long and sad. Then they fell on him, all three of them, teeth and claw, and they killed him. They left his body there on the floor.

And they flew off into the sky, and nobody saw them again.

And as soon as he was sure that he was dead, he got up and shook himself, and looked around, and there waiting for him on the bed was his wife, with long claws out, and her eyes blazing like a green cat ready to spring.



And naturally the man got up and ran away, but he could feel her cold breath on the back of his neck.

And he called out to the thunder, *Strike me dead,* but the thunder wouldn't, for he was dead already.

And he ran to the fire, and begged the fire to burn him up.

But the fire couldn't burn him, for the chill of death put it out...

And he threw himself in the water, and he screamed, *Drown me blue,* but the water wouldn't, for the death-color was coming into his face already, and the water tossed him out.

And last of all, he throws himself onto the ground, onto the midden-heap, and prays for the worms to come and eat him, so he could rest in his grave, and be quit of the woman.

He puts out one hand and he finds himself touching the skeleton hand of the old woman he'd killed for the cottage.

And he lies on the mud, his hand holding tight to that skeleton hand, waiting for his wife...

And by and by along crept a great worm, and a strange thing it was, with his wife's face on the end of its long slimy body, and it crept up beside him and over him and all around him, and it druv all the other worms away. Her teeth were sharp and long.

And she wrapped her slimy worm body around his, and she whispered his name into his ear.

And he screams, *Kill me, for god's sake, just get it over with.* But she licks her lips with a long worm tongue, and she shakes her head.

A meal this good must never be hurried, she says. *Just hold still, boy, and let me enjoy myself.*

And she takes her first, gentle bite from his cheek with her sharp sharp teeth...

And that's the story, as my mother used to tell it.

THAT'S A STRANGE STORY.

IT'S HORRID.

I ALWAYS WONDERED WHAT HAPPENED TO THE *CHILDREN*, AFTER THEY FLEW AWAY...

THEY'RE JUST *MADE-UP* PEOPLE. THEY DIDN'T REALLY EXIST.

THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY DON'T HAVE *STORIES*.

IT'D'VE GIVEN ME *NIGHTMARES*, HEARIN' A STORY LIKE THAT WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL. HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE. HAVIN' A GIANT WORM EAT YOUR FACE.

THAT WASN'T WHEN HE DIED. HE DIED BEFORE THAT, WHEN HIS CHILDREN TURNED ON HIM.

ALL DEATHS ARE HORRIBLE.

MY DANNY-- HE WAS THE AMERICAN I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT, ROSE -- HE DIED THE DAY *PEACE* BROKE OUT. RIDIN' IN A JEEP, CELEBRATIN' THE END OF THE WAR.

HE WAS LEANIN' OUT THE SIDE, AND THE DRIVER WENT TOO CLOSE TO A BRIDGE. IN PARIS. CUT DANNY'S HEAD CLEAN OFF. *BOMP.*

I LIKE TO THINK HE *WOULD'VE* MARRIED ME.

PROBABLY *WOULDN'T'VE*, THOUGH.

HE DESERVED IT. IT WAS AN ACT OF REVENGE. HE HAD KILLED AND LIED.

DANNY? HE WAS A SOLDIER. THAT'S THEIR *JOB*. KILLIN'. AND I DON'T THINK HE REALLY *LIED*. HE JUST SAID THINGS THAT WEREN'T *TRUE*. WELL, *YOU* KNOW MEN. THEY *ALL* DO THAT. THEY *HAVE* TO.

THE MAN IN THE *STORY*. HE DESERVED IT.

ACTS OF REVENGE ARE *SANC*TIFIED.

I HAVE *ALSO* DONE IT. I SPENT TWO DECADES LOOKING FOR THE MAN WHO HAD KILLED A PERSON I LOVED. I HOUNDED HIM FOR YEAR AFTER YEAR AFTER YEAR, ACROSS THE WORLD...

I FOUND HIM, AT THE LAST, IN BRIGHTON, IN ENGLAND IN THE WINTER: A GRAY, SAD TOWN. IT IS A *COLD* PLACE, ENGLAND.

REALLY? WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN YOU *FOUND* HIM?

EVENTUALLY, I KILLED HIM. FIRST, THOUGH, I DESTROYED HIS LIFE.

YOU'RE *KIDDING*, RIGHT?

JOKING WITH YOU? OF COURSE: IF I HAD REALLY KILLED A MAN, WOULD I *TELL* ANYONE?

WELL, YEAH, EXACTLY WHAT I THOUGHT.

YOU ARE SO *WISE*, GIRL.

AFTER MY TASK WAS OVER THE LIFE WENT OUT OF ME, AND I CAME HERE.

DID YOU *KNOW* MY GRAND-MOTHER?

DID YOU EVER *TALK* TO HER?

I REMEMBER HER. SHE WAS ASLEEP.

A WOMAN SHOULDN'T *HAVE* TO SLEEP HER LIFE AWAY. WOMEN AREN'T ABOUT DREAMING. WE'RE ABOUT THE *REAL* WORLD.

EVEN YOUR GRANDMA WOKE BEFORE SHE DIED.

WOMEN ARE ABOUT WAKING, ROSE.

AS MOTHERS WE WAKE THEM FROM NOTHINGNESS TO EXISTENCE.

AS MAIDENS WE WAKE THEM TO THE JOYS AND MISERIES OF ADULTHOOD, WAKE THEM TO THE WORLDS OF LUST AND RESPONSIBILITY.

AND WHEN THEIR TIME'S UP, IT'S ALWAYS *US* HAS TO WASH THEM FOR THE LAST TIME, AND WE LAY THEM OUT FOR THE WAKE.

BUT *HONESTLY*, IT MUST BE VERY DULL FOR YOU, SITTING HERE WITH THREE OLD WOMEN, YATTERING ON ABOUT SILLY OLD LADY THINGS.

WE'VE GOT A DRAUGHTS GAME TO GET BACK TO. AND AMELIA'S GOING TO HAVE HER NAP NOW. SHE ALWAYS *DOES*.

SHE'S RIGHT, YOU KNOW, DEAR. I *DO*.

HEY, PUSSY.

WHAT'S YOUR *NAME*, PUSS, *HUH*?

WOW. DID YOU SEE *THAT*?

THE BIRD? YES. VERY IMPRESSIVE.

IT WAS AN **OWL**. YOU DON'T NORMALLY SEE THEM OUT IN THE DAYTIME.

MUST BE THE **STORM**. CONFUSED IT. SILLY BIRD.

THEY'RE MEANT TO BE **WISE**, AREN'T THEY, MISTER McGUIRE? THE ONE IN *WINNIE THE POOH* WAS.

THAT WAS SET JUST DOWN THE **ROAD** FROM HERE. IN THE ASHDOWN FOREST. YOU CAN GO AND VISIT, IF YOU LIKE.

THE ENCHANTED FOREST. THE HUNDRED ACRE WOOD. THE LANDSCAPE **STILL** LOOKS JUST LIKE THE SHEPARD DRAWINGS.

I ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT THE WHOLE THING WAS MADE **UP**.

OH NO.

THE **ORIGINAL** PIGLET TOY WAS LOST IN THE ASHDOWN FOREST BY CHRISTOPHER ROBIN MILNE. MY MOTHER USED TO TAKE ME FOR WALKS IN THE FOREST AS A BOY, AND WE'D LOOK FOR PIGLET.

I WISH *I'D* DONE SOMETHING LIKE THAT. AS A KID. ALL THE DREAMS YOU HAVE. '*LOOKING FOR PIGLET...*'

IT DOESN'T **MATTER** THAT YOU NEVER FIND IT. IT'S THE **DREAMS** THAT KEEP YOU GOING.

I SUPPOSE THE POINT YOU GROW UP IS THE POINT YOU LET THE DREAMS **GO**.

PERHAPS.

DID YOU FIND WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR HERE?

NO. NOT REALLY.

COME DOWN HERE.

THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO **SHOW** YOU.

YOU'RE NOT **SOME** KIND OF **PERVERT**, ARE YOU?

I AM THE VERY **BEST** KIND OF PERVERT. IN THE WORDS OF THE IMMORTAL QUENTIN HIMSELF, I AM ONE OF THE STATELY HOMOS OF OLD ENGLAND.

MISS WALKER, I ASSURE YOU, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME.

YOU'RE GAY?

YOU KNOW, I'VE **NEVER** LIKED GAY AS A SYNONYM FOR QUEER. RENDERS A PERFECTLY DECENT WORD HORS DE COMBAT. LOST PHILOLOGICAL BATTLE, THOUGH, THERE.

THEN THERE'S THE CONTINUAL MISUSE OF THE WORD "HOPEFULLY" AS WELL. AND "ANTICIPATE" TO MEAN "EXPECT"... BUT I'M BURBLING, AREN'T I?

SURE **SOUNDS** LIKE IT.

WHERE IS IT...? MORE LIGHT, MORE LIGHT...

CLIK!

'WE ARE SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON, AND OUR LITTLE LIFE IS ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP.'

AN INTERESTING PERSPECTIVE, EH? DOES OUR LIFE END IN SLEEP? DO WE DREAM BEFORE WE ARE BORN?

UH...

DO YOU THINK HE'S **DREAMING?**

WHO **IS** HE? YOUR FATHER?

NO. HE WAS THE LOVE OF MY LIFE. STILL **IS**, I SUPPOSE.

TIN LIZZIE

THE DOLL'S HOUSE

FISH PASTE

HE WAS A MAGICIAN WITH *NO* TALENT FOR MAGIC. THEY SAY HIS *FATHER* COULD SUMMON THE FOUR WINDS TO ATTEND HIM. BLACK-MAILED PRINCES AND PRIME MINISTERS.

ALEX *TOLD* ME THAT THAT OLD FRAUD CROWLEY HIMSELF CONCEDED THAT ALEX'S FATHER WAS BY FAR THE GREATER OF THE TWO. DOESN'T SOUND LIKELY...

ALEX WAS NO MAGICIAN. BUT HIS FATHER LEFT HIM AN OBLIGATION, YOU SEE, ROSE.

HE WOULD HAVE MADE A FINE STOCKBROKER, OR HEADMASTER. A REVIEWER PERHAPS, FOR ONE OF THE QUALITY PAPERS. HIS CRITICAL WRITINGS WERE NOT WITHOUT INTEREST.

HE'S BEEN ASLEEP FOR OVER FIVE YEARS. I JUST HOPE HIS DREAMS ARE *PLEASANT* ONES.

DO YOU THINK THEY ARE?

NO. NOT REALLY.

BRR. WHEN IT STARTS TO COME DOWN LIKE THIS, YOU THINK IT *COULD* RAIN FOREVER.

WASH THE WHOLE WORLD AWAY.

YOUR..., UH, YOUR GRANDMOTHER WOKE ON SEPTEMBER THE 14th, 1988.

SOMETHING LIKE THAT. HOW DO YOU KNOW?

THAT WAS WHEN ALEX FELL ASLEEP. IRONY, EH?

Roddy Your slave in love Ethel

I SUPPOSE.

I COME IN HERE EVERY *DAY* FOR AN HOUR OR TWO. SOMETIMES LONGER.

I JUST SIT HERE. HOPING HE'LL WAKE UP.

THAT'S GOOD. IF MY GRANDMOTHER WOKE UP, I'M *SURE* YOUR ALEX WILL TOO.

NEVER LET GO OF YOUR DREAMS, EH?

EXACTLY.

MISS WALKER? SORRY TO INTRUDE. MISTER HOLDAWAY'S DOWNSTAIRS. HE SAYS WHENEVER YOU'RE READY.

CAN YOU TELL HIM I'LL BE RIGHT DOWN?

OF COURSE, DEAR.

WELL, VERY NICE TO MEET YOU, MISS WALKER.

YES. YOU TOO.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG YOU'LL BE HERE, BUT FEEL FREE TO COME DOWN TO THE GATEHOUSE AND SAY HELLO. ANY TIME AFTER FIVE.

IF YOU'RE INTO EERIE, EMPTY OLD MANOR HOUSES, WE CAN WALK UP TO THE HOUSE, AND I'LL SHOW YOU AROUND. TOO MUCH FOR *ME* TO KEEP UP. WE'RE NONE OF US AS YOUNG AS WE WERE.

I AM.

SORRY?

SURE. SOUNDS LIKE FUN!

HERE YOU GO, ALEX. FOR *LUCK.* IT WAS MY GRAND-MOTHER'S.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS, EH, OLD FELLOW?

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS...

TO BE CONTINUED.

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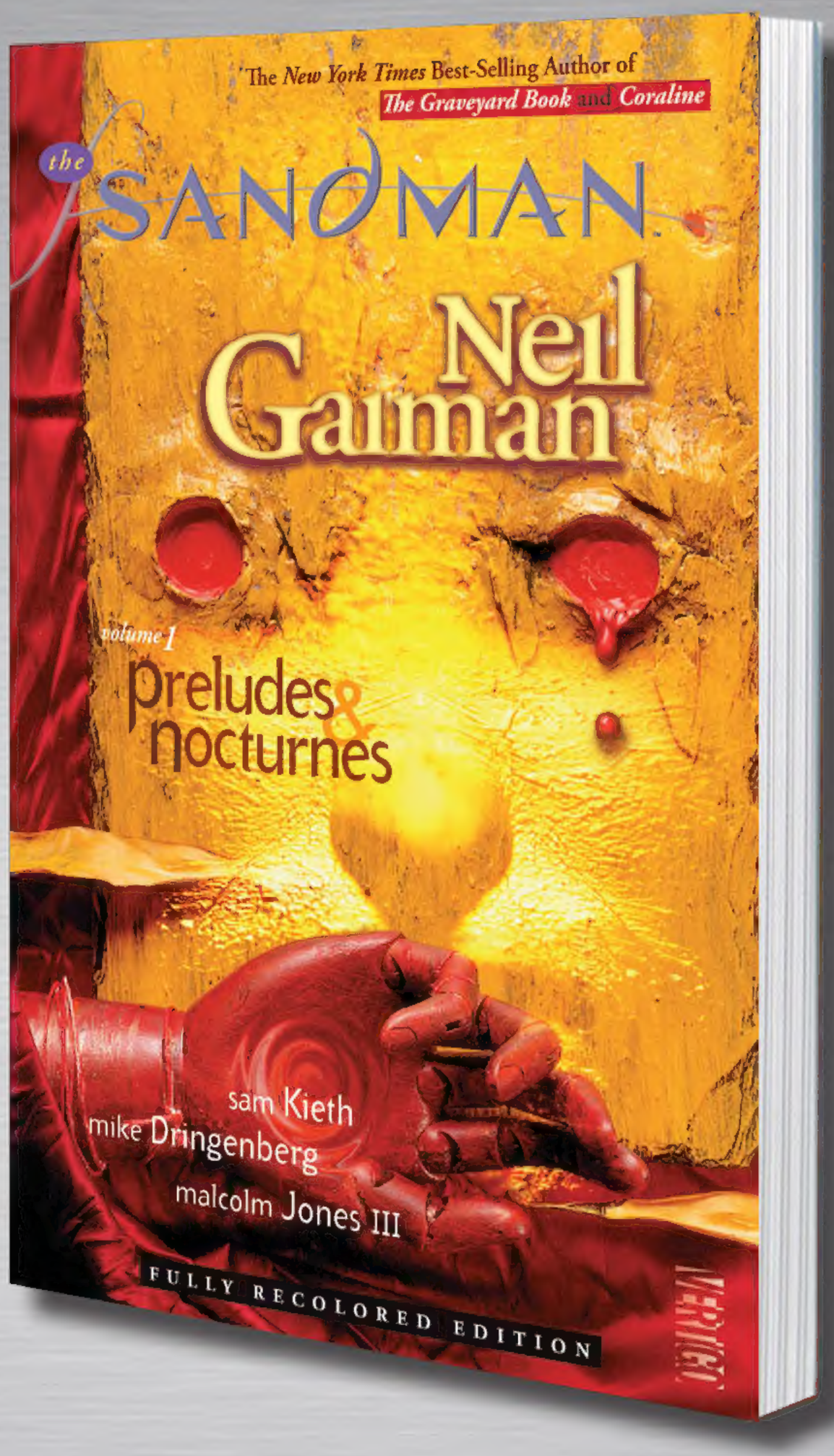

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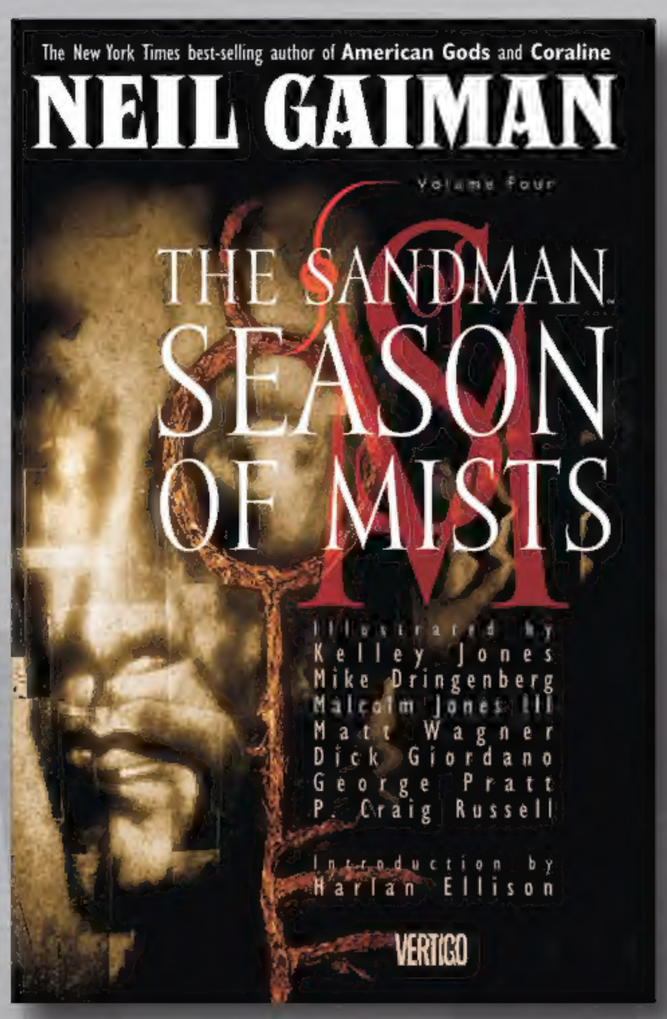

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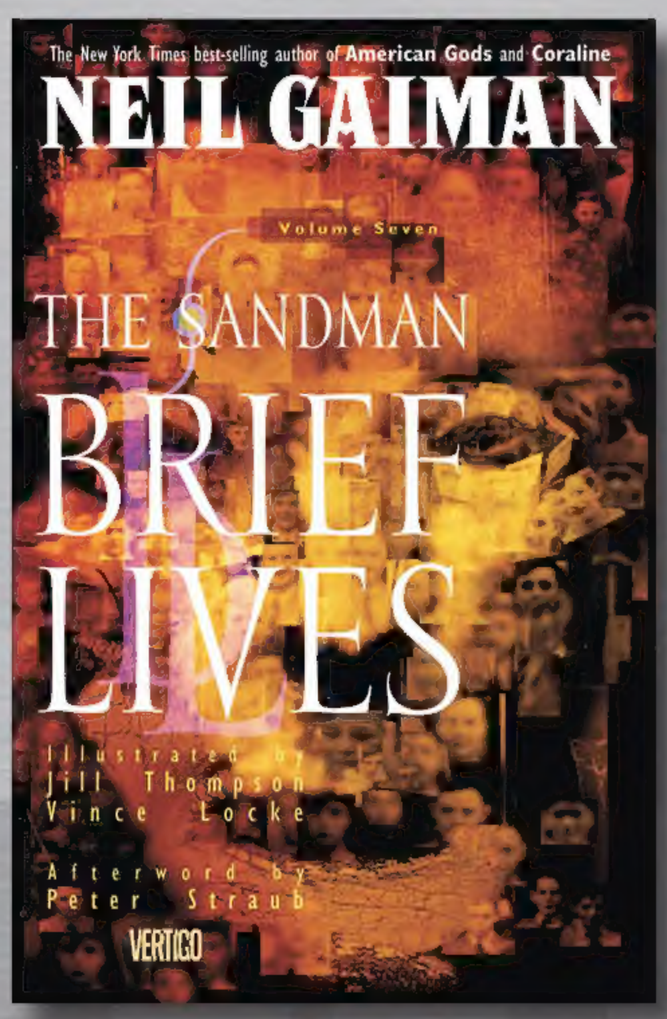

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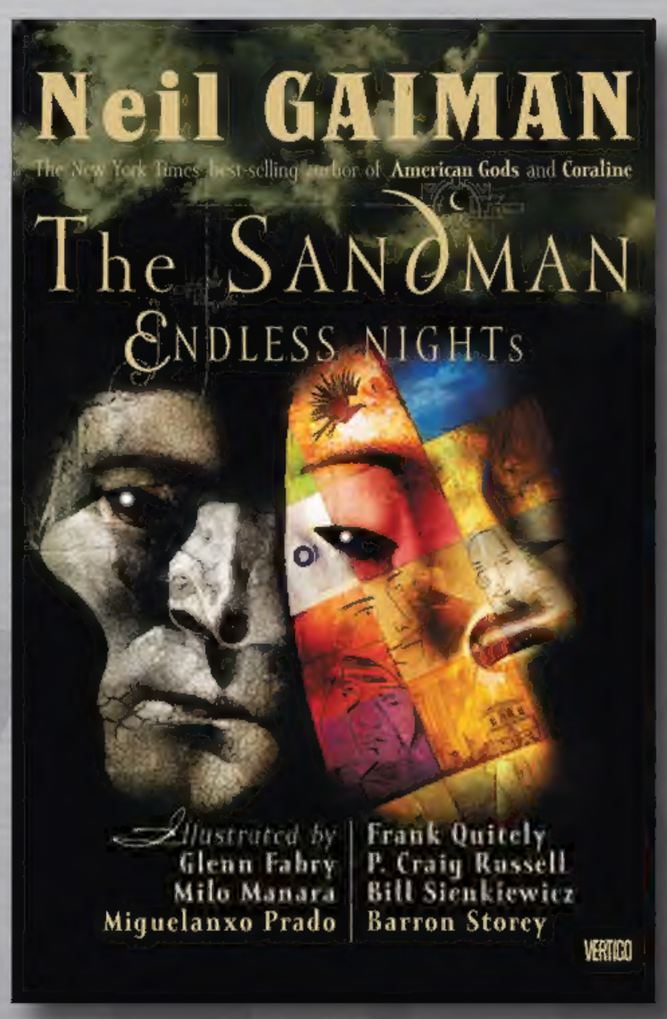

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